



The Immigrant's Song

Collected Student Essays

Edited by Paula Console-Şoican

The Immigrant's Song

Collected Student Essays

The essays included in this book were written by students in the Immigrant's Song course (offered Fall 2017) at Donnelly College in Kansas City, Kansas.

Edited by Paula Console-Şoican

Copyright Donnelly College, 2018
Cover art by Craig S. Doty

Preface

I recently read a short and compelling story in a book called *This Is Not A Border. Reportage and Reflections from the Palestine Festival of Literature*, which revealed to me with great precision my intentions with the present project. The story is by Mercedes Kemp, it is titled “Three Encounters on the West Bank,” and it is the account of a moral witness (Kemp), who travelled to the West Bank in 2010 as a guest of PalFest. In it, Kemp incorporates “fragments of what I have seen with the eyes of the heart” and at the end she gives voice to Omar, an 18 year old football player who re-enacts for Kemp the moment his childhood friend Oday was killed by the Israeli army who came to bulldoze their village:

“I went to his house. I had to tell his family he had been shot.”

“Afterwards, I was broken. I was angry.”

“I had two choices: to become a martyr or to live.”

“I chose football.” (41)

The politics concealed in this reminiscence captured my attention, but so did its vitality as a collaged story. It is a succinct and lyrical firsthand account aiming to chronicle and to present the *other*, and as such, it reminded me of the genre that gained prestige in Latin America in the 1990s, the *testimonio*. Like the *testimonio*, the Kemp story is at its basis a kind of reportage that mixes the voice of the author with the voice of an oppressed *other*, and which is intended to increase our capacity to understand and to empathize with people of different nationalities, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and in particular with people who are not authorized to speak.

With this collection of student essays from my Immigrant Fiction class from the Fall of 2017 at Donnelly College, I am merely extending the importance of reporting, of documenting the stories that people need to tell, and in this case the autoethnographic essays that my students have learned to write. I do so under the knowledge that each one of

one of us has a way of writing or talking in this autoethnographic sense that is unmatched and crucial to listen to. In what follows, I am attempting to give my students their own voice against and across the constraints imposed by our class, by the fact that this was a final exam in which the personal essay meets the literary response to one of the books we read for class.

I am including here the prompt for the final exam so that it can guide you through the reading process, and I hope that by reading these essays, you will gain the commending force of the moral witness, one who, in Homi Bhabha's description, is engaged in an ethical project to perceive progress through "the dark, sometimes distant glass of human survival."

Paula CS
16 March 2018

EN 203 - Immigrant's Song - Essay Assignment

In your final writing for this class, you are asked to address the quality of your encounter with one of the books we read for the class.

One major way in which we discussed “immigrant fiction” in the course of this semester was by addressing the central issue of subjectivity in a politicized relation to culture, state, and the nation - society by and large, both your own but also others’. In this respect, I am asking you to write a semi-autobiographical essay in which you explore your own relationship to literature and to the reading of fiction. To adapt it to our topic, I am asking you to write about the relationship between one of the novels you brought with you today and your own life, your identity, and your needs. Why exactly did you bring this novel for the exam and not another one? Which event in the novel relates to one of the events in your life? Which character resembles you and why? Conversely, how does the book not relate to you, yet means something to you, brought a new perspective on things that you did not recognize before? What critical/glossary terms are associated with this book and how did they, together with the book, contribute to a renewed understanding of yourself? Lastly, what does this choice of novel say about your tastes in reading?

This type of essay could be deeply personal/autobiographical/confessional. The prompt derived from the idea that putting our emotions into words is a way of diving deeper into our heads, and that self-reflective writing has health benefits - physical and emotional. Call it your own moment of cathartic introspection, your effort to provide candid self-reflection.

Requirements:

Two literary terms defined eloquently

Six paragraphs exactly

Contributors

Oswaldo DeLaCruz

Br. Martin Navarro

Zulina Ramirez

Angelica Perez

Maria Herrera

Christian Vallejo-Hernandez

Helary Medina Martinez

Esmeralda Sandoval

Because in a few of these essays the content is more sensitive than in others, we decided to leave the essays without authors' names and include instead a list of contributors. We hope that this way, the messages in them will be even more powerful.

Table of Contents

Overcome	9
Bane	12
Magnificat	14
Perspectives	17
Open Cities	19
Growing	21
Blighted Body	23
Injustice	26

Overcome

When I was deciding what books to bring in to talk about I immediately thought: Hector Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*. Being true to my gut it became my first choice. I am a Salvadorian born in America. I am two cultures merged into one. My mother is a refugee of the Civil War of El Salvador and my father is an immigrant of El Salvador. Through this class I have learned the difference between the two and how they affected the way my parents were able to reach this country. I have never before read a book that takes place in or talks about Central America. I realized of course that there had to be books about it but was never introduced to one.

This book opened many thoughts in my head I was ashamed to never have had before. The first being that there are universities in Central America and thus far educated and enlightened Central Americans. Both my maternal and paternal families overlooked education because survival was more important. I am the first of my family to go to college. This may not seem like it should have surprised me so much but all I've ever seen when I go visit my family in El Salvador are small clay homes and dirt streets and a general way of living I couldn't imagine going through for more than a month.

Elena was the character I most cheered for. Her fight against sexism and traditionalist ideas is inspiring. She was educated and determined, something dangerous in a woman for some. There is a part in the book I remember very well where Elena is trying to find a way to be more involved with San Cristobal's poor sanitation in the slum area of town. Basically, she is trying to understand why these indigenous people are living in such horrible conditions. This is seen as a rebellion and she isn't too undercover about her investigation. People see her and report her which leads to her being killed. This part reminded me of something

horrifying my mother told me happened during the Civil War in El Salvador. She told me that in her hometown people would tell the guerillos on each other. They didn't do it to be loyal or anything like that, they would tell the guerillos on whole families they didn't like so that family would die. My grandfather saw this happening and went straight to his home, grabbed almost nothing but his family and what everyone was wearing, and fled. My mother says she remembers leaving while they were making lunch. She remembers the tortillas getting left still cooking, still on the fire as she left her hometown. They were scared someone would point a finger for whatever reason and they would have to pay the consequences.

It was important for me to read about Elena not just because of her experiences but because I related to her identity. Being from a Hispanic family and being first born in this country I grew up having only gendered roles and stereotypes thrown at me ever since I can remember. For a while I thought it was normal that I was expected to be a certain way because I am a girl. In my culture I'm expected to aspire to marriage and to basically be a housewife. It wasn't till I met strong women and felt inspired to have goals and aspirations beyond marriage that I came into my own. I will never not appreciate a strong woman throwing social norms out the window, because someday I'd like to inspire someone to want to do more.

This book really brought to mind a vision of a refugee that I had never felt so close to home with. I could see this war because it reminded me of my mother's confessions to me about living in the heat of a civil war. When people read, some do imagine what they are reading if it is descriptive enough, but I could see this book clear as day. Another thing this book made me think about that I have noticed before is the pure lack of books being taught at school that have minorities and the adversities that come with them. Why is it that books where women are heroes or where the main characters have names like mine, were never taught in school or recommended? All my life I've been surrounded by minorities in a lower income part of town and I never saw this lifestyle represented in the books we read in class. Why did I read Shakespeare when I could have been told a story about a refugee, something more relevant and eye opening?

So, what does me liking this book say about me? It says that I appreciate books that hit home and have inspirational female icons. I'm all about fighting social norms and predetermined roles. This is a book I'm glad I bought because I want it to be a part of my personal library.

This book is overall about trauma and how you decide to deal with it. I agree that sometimes we feel the need to get revenge on the people who pushed us off course but it's that temptation that you will never be able to escape if you submit just once. Trauma comes in different shapes and sizes and one cannot be compared to another. I don't know what it's like to have my family killed but I have been hurt either way. That hurt might not be a big deal or might seem easy to move forward from for some, but for me it's the heaviest thing I carry on my shoulders. I decide everyday how to deal with mine and how to move forward with it. Memories can haunt you but they shouldn't control your life. Overcome tragedy to make it an experience, then make it prosperity.

Bane

To start off, the best book I read by far is the *Satanic Verses*. This book hit home for me for a lot of reasons. For one, it is a bit odd that religion was brought up and was a huge issue in this novel. In a way, I was slightly liberated from ideological thinking. I was similar to Saladin when he cursed his country: “Damn you India.... To hell with you, I escaped your clutches long ago, you want to get your hooks back into me again” (Rushdie 35). To me, it speaks a lot that while being an immigrant, I also feel misplaced at home. While reflecting on this, I would rather be as far away as possible from my family. Not for the reason of war or because of an economic crisis. Just for the fact that they think differently than me and are trapped in a fundamentalist mindset. Saladin appeared to be a religious person but soon realized the trouble it causes the world. My goal in life is not to bash any religion. Yet, it is necessary for us to tell the difference between faith and reason.

“Information got abolished sometime.... Since then we’ve been living in a fairy tale....us fairies haven’t a fucking notion what’s going on” (Rushdie 323). Ignorance of ethics and of other things is the greatest enemy the world has today. It is the obstacle that I face the most in my life. I live in a household that is fueled by religion. I call it a theocratic culture and the only truth in their mind is the Bible. I sometimes feel exiled at times because there’s no reason or logical thinking in that household but scripture. I cannot assimilate or migrate out of my own family leaving me in a state of imprisonment. Ironically being an immigrant in a new country and also being exiled mentally. My only place of security is in my mind and with nowhere to go or seek comfort, I must tolerate my family and their blighted thinking, patiently waiting for them to realize how wrong their thinking is.

I do not call for the destruction of any mindset, all I want is the discernment between faith and reason in my house. Not self-absorbed

people. At the beginning of the novel, Saladin was portrayed as a demon. As you progress through the novel you start noticing that he is a cool guy. While the author's purpose for writing the book was to criticize religion, it doesn't represent me. There needs to be a clear barrier between religion and reason!

Magnificat

Almost since the beginning of the semester, a scene from *The Tattooed Soldier* by Hector Tobar has caused me to reflect on a few moments from my infancy that I believe greatly affected who I would become. For no other reason did I bring this book but for this one scene and what it did for me.

Guillermo forgot to bring back the soap because he went to the theater instead, but his mother is not angry at him. She wants him to stand and work, because the plants need human hands to help them grow. With invisible strings she pulls him up, and now he is walking toward her through rows of corn. Leaves brush his face cool and moist. Rainbow colored trousers hang loosely from his waist, fabric she wore at the loom. On his feet are sandals, strips of old leather held together with wire and twine. He smiles at his dirty toes, mud caked in the nails. So strange and happy, after all these years, to be wearing his peasant clothes again. And now words from his mother in a language he has nearly forgotten. “Balam,” she says.

It's the moment just before Guillermo Longoria dies, lying in a tunnel, bleeding, organs shutting down and fading out of consciousness. Life is so fragile, and our natural fear is the consequence of our uncertainty of what comes next, if anything. Longoria's last thought is the most peaceful, of what would have been had he returned from the theater. He is certain that this is what it would have been like because he was secure in the reality of being loved by his mother. He doesn't have rich, expensive things, but what he has brings him joy because it was given to him by the love of his mother.

This event brought to mind two particular events in my life. When I was still in the crib, I woke up one night, not afraid, but lonely. My older sister (by one year) slept in a bed in the same room as I.

I stood up in my crib and called for my mom once. I knew she wouldn't appear immediately, so I waited a moment to try again. I had no concept of numbers, but only of "again" and "again after again". I called again, knowing she would come sometime between "again" and "again after again", so I didn't let the pause last so long so that she would be there sooner. I called "again after again" and the light came on. I stepped back and put my arms up. I moaned to inform her of my loneliness so that we could just be there together.

When I was three, my grandmother was babysitting me while my mom was at work. My grandfather smoked in the house, and one day I begin coughing aggressively and wouldn't stop. My grandmother has me in her arms as she is speaking on the phone crying. I have no idea why she was crying. I am still coughing when she takes me outside to a group of strangers who put me in an ambulance. I am lying on the stretcher when I looked out the back doors, which are still open. I see my mom park and run to the ambulance to join me. The EMT puts the green oxygen mask over my face as I lie there and I see my mom start to cry (lung trouble kept me in NICU for two months after I was born). But seeing my mom cry, "NO!" was my immediate thought. I proceeded to say, "It's ok, Mommy. It's ok." I tried offering her every comforting word she ever gave me. Choking to death? No problem. Seeing my mom suffer – problem! She tried showing me how I needed to breathe so I could get oxygen from the mask, and I willingly obeyed only so that her suffering might end.

The other book I brought with me was *Under the Feet of Jesus*. If you remember my essay, "Ave, Maris Stella", I wrote about the beauty of motherhood.

In my adulthood, my mom and I have moved to different cities frequently (separately, as I was out of the house after high school). People often ask me where "home" is for me. I've tried giving different answers because, each time, the answer never felt right. I was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri. The majority of my extended family lives in Kansas City, Kansas, but my mom lived in Denver, where I had never lived. Eventually, I arrived at the truth: home is where your mom lives.

The certainty and security of a mother's love, capable of assuring a person of their worth and dignity as an individual subject, not just "a human person with rights", a phrase that can often be faceless, but someone worth loving. She herself was a gift to me, a person that was a gift. When I rediscovered my faith, a personal experience of a God who transcends time and space revealed that same love to an infinite degree

in Himself on the Cross. With these two loves, I find that I've been cured of so many wounds that so many people have that send them chasing after money, sex, and power in an attempt to find healing. I've lived in many places away from all family and friends, but this gift of having been loved has made every situation bearable. All of this might explain why I am free and able to choose to be a Catholic monk, because I can love others without asking for any love in return. I have all I need.

Perspectives

Today, I brought two books which I could relate to but I will only talk about one of them. *The Guardians* by Ana Castillo is the novel to which I relate. Castillo uses commentary from all sides such as political, historical, social, and religious. This novel opened my eyes to those who live on the U.S.-Mexico border and gave me a new perspective. As a daughter of immigrants, a first generation U.S. citizen in my family, it gave me a view of how it is to cross the border and to live on it.

My mother is from Mexico and my father is from Cuba so there is a difference of how they came to the U.S. and how they are treated here. When my mother left Mexico it wasn't as dangerous and difficult as it is now. As time goes on the political climate about immigration changes. Now the border is like a militarized zone in order to stop those who are crossing the border illegally. In Castillo's novel, the border is a dangerous place especially for those who cross it with coyotes.

Gabo loses his father, Rafa, when he was crossing the border with a coyote and is believed to be dead. The characters in the novel talk about coyotes taking some of the organs of their clients and selling them on the black market. I knew that some coyotes were dangerous but I never knew until I read the novel that they would go as far as killing their clients for selling their organs in the black market. I myself never experienced crossing the border or meeting coyotes so it was something I never knew.

Reading contemporary fictional novels helped me understand that every immigrant comes to the U.S. differently from each other. There are different types of immigrants and literature gives each their own voice. I like to read stories about other people's past and how they adjust to living in a different country usually the U.S. and how they compare and contrast it from their native country. Reading "immigrant fiction" helps me understand a small part of themselves that they might or might not talk about.

I brought this book because I thought it is the most relatable to myself. I can't say that this book relates to any specific event in my life except for the missing/absent parent. My mother, unlike Rafa, is alive in Mexico, but Gabo's father is missing. To deal with his absence, Gabo completely involves himself in religion and aspires to become a priest. I am the opposite: ever since my mother returned to Mexico I stopped going to church. If I had time and transportation on Sundays I would probably go. So, in a way Gabo resembles me the most, yet almost not all.

Borderland, border identity, and identity crisis are critical/glossary terms that are related to this novel. The setting of the novel is on the U.S.-Mexico border where two different cultures and languages reside. Those who live there and were born there have an identity crisis as to which culture they should belong to. This is where border identity is derived from. Border identity refers to those who recognize and acknowledge that they do not just belong to one culture and speak one language but more than one. All of the four main characters have a border identity since they share two cultures and speak two languages. Even though I was born in the U.S. I still consider myself to have a border identity because I grew up with two or more distinct cultures just like Gabo and Regina.

Open Cities

When I began reading the novel by Teju Cole, *Open City*, I found myself relating to Julius at times and thinking about his patients. As a psychologist, Julius shows his Afropolitanist views, being a global citizen with African roots. It was difficult to see that Julius, without even wanting to really think or care about others' disorders, still would. *Open City* was a book that was challenging but relatable to me. With regards to my identity, I felt that I could relate to Julius. The way he cared and thought about his patients and wanted to help them. The way he meditates and goes to the park on a walk.

Relating to Julius, I wish I could succeed in graduating like him. There is a part in the book where Mr. F, the depressed veteran who is one of Julius' patients, tells him that he is "proud to come here and see a young black man like yourself in that white coat, because things haven't ever been easy for us, and no one has ever given us nothing without a struggle" (Cole 210). Julius has been cosmopolitan in the way he is a citizen of the world standing in solidarity with other marginalized people. There are three types of Pan Africanism which is not the same as Afropolitanism (which Julius represents): there is racial solidarity, Anti-imperialist solidarity, and international solidarity. Julius is in unity with his patients and this is the part I connect to in my life, through that relationship of his unity to people is really where I found my interest in the novel.

My identity has been changed from learning about cosmopolitanism. It really matters to be able to be a citizen of the world in standing in the different solidarity. Julius was a good and bad example of a role model. Bad because of what he did to Moji. Good because of his understanding to wanting to connect with foreigners.

One of the events which I could relate to is where Julius is on a boat, staring at the Statue of Liberty, at the end of the novel. This

moment to him is filled with something new and seeing life from a new perspective. I have had a moment like this before when I went to visit my aunts in New York and noticed the details of the crown of the Statue of Liberty.

The reason why I picked this book and not the others is because it's the one that challenged me as a reader. Reading this novel and it being one of my favorites says that my taste is in firsthand personal narratives. I like books about the person who is taking me through his life and thoughts. I came to a new version of myself after understanding cosmopolitanism from this novel. I understand how to take who Julius is and his reflections and make them mine and how to be more accepting and aware of others and their needs.

There are many of us that struggle with finding our identity. Does our identity come from language? *The Post Colonial Studies* essay "Passport Photos" by Kumar talks about how identity for an immigrant has been seen through language. Kumar can argue it is more than that. *Open City* has me really question to find my identity and how in finding my identity I can understand myself where I come from and be cosmopolitan, a global citizen where I stand in solidarity with the larger community of people around me. This novel has renewed my thinking on reflecting on who I am as an immigrant wanting an education. Looking towards the future I want to read more novels questioning identity and standing in stance with political and cultural differences.

Growing

For a long time, during my teenage years, I ignored the fact that I was an immigrant. This was not because I was ignorant of the fact, since I knew I was born in Mexico, that I was darker than the people around me, that my eyes were brown in color, and that my hair was thick and black. I chose to ignore that I was an immigrant because I wanted to reject that side of me. I wanted to be like my friends, I wanted to be someone I can never be, I wanted to be white.

Growing up, immigration was always a topic of conversation in my household. It was a topic that when discussed brought sadness to the eyes of my family members, and as a little girl I always wondered why that was. As I began to grow I soon caught on. I began to understand why my mother and father placed everything under their names. Why, at times, my parents were forced to provide for my aunts and uncles. I began to understand that my family, was in one major way, better off than them. We were legal.

When I was seven, my family took a road trip to Nuevo Laredo. It was a one day trip consisting of eight hours on the road. Although I did not realize this at the time, the plan for the trip was to cross the American Border to Nuevo Leon, where my Aunt would be waiting for us to pick her up and give her a ride back to the border and drop her off at the park. There we left her but I didn't seem to understand why. My family then crossed the Border into Nuevo Laredo in which we waited all night for a phone call that would tell us when we could pick my aunt up. When that phone call came, we did just that and drove the eight hours back home. All throughout, I had a constant fear and anxiety in my stomach, but I wasn't sure why. As I look back on this experience, it occurs to me that I had all the right to be afraid. It was my first real experience with immigration and it is one that I will never forget.

I realized as a young adult the consequences that would have

come if my family had been caught. Not only would we have been deported but my parents would have been sent to jail. I would have been stripped of all my belongings and I would have been left without a family.

I can only imagine that that fear and anxiety I felt for that one day, can only describe half the way immigrants, especially those that are undocumented, feel on a daily basis. I chose to bring the novel *The Tattooed Soldier* by Hector Tobar, because I can understand the struggle his characters have with finding somewhere to belong.

I especially can associate my parents with Antonio's struggle of trying to keep afloat in a country that constantly closes its doors. The feeling of incompetence that comes with being illegal, with being a minority, and having no voice; my family knows it very well.

Immigrants often times can be placed under the description of a subaltern. We are minorities in this country, often seen and judged as being ignorant and incapable of speaking for ourselves. We lack representation and many times when someone does speak on our behalf, they do it wrong. This is not the case only seen in America. In our own countries we are ignored and forced to keep silent. We are oppressed and pushed to our limits, often times having to leave our countries and become labels of refugees, exiles, illegal immigrants and more. We are kicked out of our countries because we are forced to look for ways of survival. All immigrants are forced to make the decision of whether we continue to be oppressed or we fight to have our voice heard. We become united in this way and we create solidarity with one another.

We understand that through our union, we can fight against the oppression, that we can stop being the subaltern, that we can be our own voices telling our own confessions, regardless if they are good or not, and tell our own stories, like Antonio and Longoria.

Blighted Body

The book that I enjoyed and connected to the most is *Open City*. I consider myself to be a lot like Julius. I enjoy listening to people's stories because I find them interesting; however, I am often not roused by them. I was not called to action because of the stories. All the books in this class contained stories about real or fictitious people, but they are just stories. The stories were thought provoking, but they did not inspire me to go out and change the world. For one, there are so many problems, and I cannot fix the world alone. That is why many people stop caring or do not do anything.

In my case, I do not know what to do. I am a dumb, broke college student who has ADD and depression and all kinds of problems. What good could I be, besides listening to people's struggles? That is how Julius had a similar experience. He listened and did not share much about his own opinions and only occasionally asked questions. In the end, I am like that because I just listen. I like to talk about insignificant things like shows, comic books, and things that do not matter in this world. When important conversations happen, I usually try to avoid them or I simply don't know what to say. That is why I never really participate in class. It is hard for me to admit it, but in your class, I was forced to step out of my bubble and think of the world as more than just a fucked up place. I learned vocabulary and read books and academic essays that I would have never read on my own or learned.

One of my favorite parts in *Open City* was around the middle of the book when Julius travels to Brussels. He has a conversation with Dr. Maillotte on the plane, and he later ends up having lunch with her before leaving Brussels. What really caught my attention were his conversations with Farouq and later when he has a meal with Farouq and Khalil. All of these characters have different backgrounds and different perspectives on life and political views.

Julius let them share their perspective of the topic at hand, even if it was different than what he thought. What personally stood out to me was the conversations they had about the Jews and Palestinians. The conversation involved the aftermath of World War II when they were given part of Palestine to make Israel. The Palestinians were not happy about this, and the main argument is that six million died in concentration camps. It was Europe's problem not the Palestinians because they did not build the concentration camps. It was like giving special privileges to the Jews, or "the chosen people," when, in reality, anyone dying is a tragic thing regardless of the numbers. This all came down to power or who has the resources. While reading I appreciated that new perspective of how Julius processed all that information. Similarly, I usually have to go home and process everything from this class.

When I started reading *Open City*, I felt that Julius was isolated, very detached from the world around him. One prime example was when he realized the women's march was going on and did not want to get stuck in the middle of it. This is how I am about world problems for the most part. But recently something that I am passionate about became a thing to talk about: sexual assault. I know this is an immigrant and exile class, but many of the words used in this class are applicable to numerous topics. "Solidarity" and "marginalized" are two words I knew walking into this class and are words we talked about a lot too. The reason I am so familiar with solidarity and marginalized is because I was sexually assaulted.

Due to my experience, I isolated myself from other people. I had been marginalized before, but this time, it was the worst time to feel alone or outside something. It all started with sexual harassment, an unwanted comment, to later this person thinking they had the opportunity to grab me when they pleased. That same person sexually assaulted me and groped me. The one thing that people do not always realize is that these things do not only happen once and then go away. In reality, it can happen continuously. For me it was something that started small, making me feel uncomfortable, invading my personal space to flat out grabbing me inappropriately.

When I realized what was happening to me, I felt dumb, ashamed, and worthless. It was something no one talked about, and if they did, well, they were shamed for it. At least for the people I knew that had been sexually assaulted when they talked about it, they were blamed for it. A victim should never be blamed for what happened to them. They

should get all the support in the world. The feeling of being unsafe and worthless led to me being depressed and caused me to have many mood swings. For a while, I got social anxiety, and I did not want to go to school dances or school at all, so I could avoid this person. I avoided going to certain stores and places to not run into them. Until this day, I usually avoid going out to certain places, I have limited the places I go to because of fear.

For many years, I kept my story silent. I refused to share it with others. However, recently, I have built relationships with other sexual assault victims. They gave me solidarity and became solid close friends of mine. Knowing you are not alone is great, but we were all subalterns. No one wanted to address the topic of people being sexually harassed or assaulted until recently with all the allegations that society is forced to talk about it and truly come together and try to come up with solutions or help. I can relate to Moji in the scene that she has been violated in a way: I may not have been raped but close to it. It messes with you for years. I thought I was truly worthless, and it is hard to move on. It is hard to forgive and forget.

This book affected me tremendously because I related so much the main character Julius and the victim Moji whom Julius forgot he hurt. I was able to address my feelings about my sexual harassment/assault experiences through the reading of this book. I saw a lot of myself in Julius from the way I went through the world, listening to people's stories, not doing anything about it. By the end of the book, I still felt a connection to Julius's character, but Moji's confession moved me to want to talk about my experience more. This book made me appreciate this class more because I think of the world more critically now, and I can apply this knowledge for other things too.

Injustice

I fell in love with the book *Under the Feet of Jesus* by Helena Maria Viramontes because it has inspired those who suffer injustice in their everyday job due to their illegal status in the United States. Viramontes becomes the voice of the immigrant workers who do not have a voice for themselves. I notice that the book is written in memory of Cesar Chavez, an activist who is the Co-founder of the National Farm Worker Association, which later became known as the United Farm Workers Union or UFW. This book was first published in 1995, two years after Cesar Chavez' death in 1993. Viramontes mentioned that her parents met in Buttonwillow picking cotton: could it be that her parents benefited from the civil rights movement that Cesar Chavez made in that time? That is why she dedicated an appreciation to him for being the person that fought for their rights.

This book gives me a portrait of the year 1950s because it talks of the slavery wages paid and how bad the injustice was for an immigrant worker in that time. The main character was Petra, a young mother of four, and left or (abandoned) by her husband. She found herself raising four children the best she could. I know the book does not say why she ended up with a guy 33-years older than she, named Perfecto, but I am confident to say being a child of a mother who had the same (issues) role-experience-situation as Petra, it was because she could not have raised four children on her own, especially if she was working for pennies in the fields and struggling to make a living. Sometimes mothers must make hard choices for the wellbeing of their children and not of their own. I came to that same realization that after I was put in a very uncomfortable situation where I had little support and was vulnerable to accept any offer if it helped me, despite being prideful or not, even if the offer defied what I was taught as a child of morals and values.

Petra reminds me of my mom, who immigrated to the United States all to have a better life. She worked hard for us to be reunited. When we arrived, my mom was living in a small bedroom. I saw a scary looking guy in the room lying down on the bed. Confused about where my real dad was and thinking why he was missing, little did I know this was our new dad. All I could think of is a scene that took place in Mexico when I was three years old. I remember us watching a movie, and my dad and my mom were lying down next to each other; my mom had me in between her legs and holding my little brother Jonathan with her right hand, and my dad holding my big brother Erick in his left arm, while Rafael was lying across both of my parents' legs. We all seemed very happy and united, and I still wonder what happened to our family.

Taking the decision to be with someone for personal interest comes with many consequences. Although Ivan helped my mom financially over the years, my two big brothers were affected because Ivan was not a loving person, which created a mindset on all of us to be this type of person who cannot show any feelings to anybody because that was a sign of weakness. For example, making me lie to my mother and try to make me believe that cheating was ok that it was a natural thing that everybody does. My older brother mimics him to perfection; sadly, he committed a crime and was set up for trial. He expected a jail sentence of 30 years but his sentence would be reduced to 7 years if good conduct was established.

I don't blame my mom for any of my brothers' actions because she did what she thought would be best. Finding herself removed from solidarity, she had no choice but rely on any help she could get from anyone. Her fear of being deported and of losing us set her outside the law.

Bibliography

Castillo, Ana. *The Guardians*. Random House, 2008.

Cole, Teju. *Open City*. Random House, 2011.

Soueif, Ahdaf and Omar Robert Hamilton, eds. *This Is Not A Border. Reportage and Reflections from the Palestine Festival of Literature*. Bloomsbury, 2017.

Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. Random House, 2008.

Tobar, Hector. *The Tattooed Soldier*. Picador, 1998.

Viramontes, Maria Helena. *Under the Feet of Jesus*. Plume, 1995.

